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Author: Magdalena Sitko-Dominik

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Generational Membership and the Intensity of Social Media use Among Young Adults

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Abstract

Young adults use social media to realize both social and educational goals. The aim of the study is to investigate whether there are any differences in the intensity of Facebook use between Generation Y and Generation Z. In addition, the size of friend networks has been analyzed.

The Questionnaire of the Intensity of Facebook Use (Kuś, & Szulżycki, 2014) was used. The study was conducted in a group of 100 persons, 50 representatives of Generation Y and 50 representatives of Generation Z.

The results show that there are generational differences in the intensity of Facebook use. It is shown that having a large number of friends is related to the way in which Facebook is used among representatives of Generation Y.

Key words: *generational membership, Facebook, young adulthood*

Introduction

The Internet is used by young adults to support educational and social development (Juszczyk, 2015). Until now, research has been focused on representatives of Generation Y. However, when representatives of a new generation enter higher education, it is important to identify their needs and values, to investigate the way in which they use social media and how intensively.

Recent research stresses the necessity to adjust educational methods to students' needs, and that educational reforms are also conditioned by the participation of

Generation Y representatives in global culture (DiLullo, McGee, & Kriebel, 2011). Thus, it is vital to verify popular opinions on the functioning of particular generations in the digital space in order to understand the role of new technologies in the process of learning (Kennedy et al., 2010).

A generation is a group of people of a similar age, living in a particular time and historical space. Similar life experience results in creation of a group personality (Howe, & Strauss, 2000). Twenge, Campbell & Freeman (2012) compare generational differences to cultural differences, as socialization of every generation is based on different systems of values, similar to socialization in different cultures.

New technologies have become an inherent element of the lives of young adults, which has an impact on their behavior, and their expectations concerning education and life style (Howe, & Strauss, 2000; Oblinger, Oblinger, & Lippincott, 2005). Young adults, (persons aged between 18 and 35, Brzezińska, 2015), are the most numerous group of Facebook users and are extremely affected by global culture (Raport Gemius, 2015).

Generation Y is not perceived unequivocally; some researchers indicate that representatives of this generation are socially engaged and community-oriented (Howe, & Strauss, 2000), while others claim that representatives of this generation focus on themselves and on achieving external goals, such as material resources and fame (Twenge, Campbell, & Freeman, 2012). For Generation Y it is important to create social networks through the Internet (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006); to be in contact with close friends and relatives (Palfrey, & Gasser, 2008); and to establish new social norms and patterns of behavior by means of using social media (Bolton et al., 2013).

Generation Z, also described as global, does not know a reality without the Internet (Howe, & Strauss, 2000); representatives of this generation value family and safety, and cherish traditional values (Williams, & Page, 2011), which is reflected in their attitude to religion (Turner, 2015). Groups they belong to are also important for them, because they form part of their identity (Williams, & Page, 2011). In addition, representatives of Generation Z prefer to communicate through social media rather than face-to-face (Törőcsik, Szűcs, & Kehl, 2014).

The use of the Internet can satisfy many psychological needs (Suler, 1999), however the main motivation to use Facebook is the opportunity to self-present and to satisfy the need for belonging (Nadkarni, & Hofmann, 2012). Facebook makes it possible for the individual to construct a socially desirable identity (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008) by creating one's own profile, or by identifying with a group of persons described as friends (Boyd, & Ellison, 2007). Meta-analyses indicate that the size of someone's virtual social network increases until he/she reaches

young adulthood; while afterwards its gradual decrease can be observed (Wrzus et al., 2013). Being extravert helps you to get more friends (Amichai-Hamburger, & Vinitzky, 2010); and narcissistic persons often try to make as many friends as possible (Bergman et al., 2011). Having friends whom one does not know in person is related to having lower self-esteem in comparison with one's perception of others (Chou, & Edge, 2012).

Generation Y presents a high level of academic optimism (Sax, 2003) which helps them to achieve success in education (Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006). However, if someone does not make an effort to achieve a desired goal, he/she may experience conflict (Lancaster, & Stillman, 2002), because representatives of Generation Y want to get good marks, while making a minimum contribution (Sax, 2003).

In accordance with the cultural script, the teaching process is adjusted to the preferences of students (Twenge, 2014), which coincides with the expectations of representatives of Generation Y, who want to make autonomous decisions about the choice of the content, time and methods of teaching. Instead of the transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the student, they prefer interactive methods of teaching (Carlson, 2005), in small groups, with the use of technology (Prensky, 2001), and visual and kinesthetic aids (Tapscott, 1998). Apart from this, representatives of Generation Y use Facebook as a tool in communication for educational purposes, especially when they perform group tasks (Bullen, Morgan, & Quayyum, 2011).

Some researchers claim that Generation Y differs from other generations in the use of cognitive processes, because some of its representatives have problems with critical thinking. Fast living results in situations where representatives of Generation Y do not have time for reflection, and so instead of reading and considering different questions, they prefer to learn from experience (Prensky, 2001, Prensky, & Berry, 2001). The evaluation of their competences is made with standardized tests which do not require creativity (DeBard, 2004), which is why it is advisable to use interactive methods in the process of education (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000), which helps learners to acquire knowledge and use it creatively (Tapscott, 1998).

Methodology of Research

Research Purpose

The aim of the study is to investigate whether Generations Y and Z differ in their use of Facebook. The intensity of Facebook use by young adults and the size of their networks of friends were analyzed.

Research Sample

The study was conducted on 100 young adults: 50 belonging to Generation Y and 50 belonging to Generation Z. Generation Z included persons aged 18–23, while Generation Y included persons aged of 24–35. The generational division was based on the boundaries drawn for the two generations: Generation Y (1981–1994), and Generation Z (1995–2009) (Oblinger, Oblinger, & Lippincott, 2005). The research participants were recruited by means of the “snow ball” method.

The mean age in the research group was: $M=24.86$; $SD=5.16$; for Generation Y - $M=29.28$; $SD=3.48$; for Generation Z - $M=20.44$; $SD=1.38$. More than half of the research participants had completed secondary education (57%); 39% higher education; while 4% had finished vocational education. The participants differed significantly with respect to place of residence: 36% lived in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants; 35% lived in cities with less than 100,000 inhabitants; and 29% lived in the country.

Instrument and Procedures

Each research participant received a set consisting of questions concerning socio-demographic information and a questionnaire. The paper and pencil survey was conducted individually. There was no Internet-mediated survey. The research participants did not receive any financial gratification.

In the study, the following research tool was used:

The Questionnaire of the Intensity of Facebook Use (Kuś, & Szulżycki, 2014) which can be used to evaluate the intensity of Facebook use (*Facebook as an inherent element of life*), and to measure 5 styles of Facebook use: *Facebook celebrities*, *Players*, *Conscious self-presenters*, *Fanpage members*, and *Information seekers*. The styles were distinguished on the basis of Evans' (2012) typology. The questionnaire consists of 51 items where participants have to give their opinion on a 4-point scale where 1 means *I absolutely disagree*, and 4 - *I absolutely agree*. Reliability for the whole tool was found to be $\alpha=0.93$.

Data analysis

To analyze the data, the analytical software package Statistica 13.1 was used. The analysis of generational differences in Facebook use and the size of friend networks was conducted on the basis of a Student's t-test for independent variables characterized by normal distribution (*Facebook as an inherent element of life*, *Conscious self-presenters*, *Fanpage members*) while for variables without normal distribution (*Facebook celebrities*, *Players*, *Information seekers*, *number of friends on Facebook*) the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test was applied. Spearman's

rank correlation was also calculated, to determine the relation between the size of friend networks and the intensity of Facebook use for each generation.

Research Results

The analyses conducted for two independent samples using the Student's t-test showed that representatives of Generations Y and Z differ in the use of two factors of Facebook use: *Facebook as an inherent element of life* and *Fanpage members*. Generation Z representatives significantly more frequently treated *Facebook as an inherent element of life* ($M=32.68$) in comparison to members of Generation Y ($M=28.70$). Moreover, representatives of Generation Z used Facebook to create groups ($M=21.00$) more frequently than representatives of Generation Y ($M=18.44$) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Generational membership and the intensity of Facebook use. Student's t-test results for two independent samples.

| | Generation Y | | Generation Z | | T(98) | p-value | d |
|---|--------------|------|--------------|------|-------|---------|-------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | | | |
| Facebook as an inherent element of life | 28.70 | 8.45 | 32.68 | 9.21 | -2.25 | 0.03 | -0.44 |
| Facebook celebrities | 17.60 | 5.59 | 16.00 | 5.36 | 1.46 | 0.15 | 0.29 |
| Players | 7.68 | 3.98 | 9.22 | 5.15 | -1.67 | 0.10 | -0.33 |
| Conscious self-pre-senters | 16.38 | 4.07 | 17.04 | 4.97 | -0.73 | 0.47 | -0.15 |
| Fanpage members | 18.44 | 4.84 | 21.00 | 5.11 | -2.57 | 0.01 | -0.50 |
| Information seekers | 16.04 | 3.46 | 16.48 | 5.43 | -0.48 | 0.63 | -0.10 |

Note: The nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test used for variables with non-equal variance: *Facebook celebrities*, *Players*, *Information seekers* got identical results as far as the significance of the investigated differences is concerned.

The analysis of the size of friend networks in Facebook showed that representatives of Generation Z have more friends than representatives of Generation Y ($U=735$; $Z=3.55$; $p<0,001$). The results are shown in Figure 1.

The analysis conducted for generational membership and the number of friends in Facebook showed correlation only among representatives of Generation Y between the number of friends and the intensity of using the following styles of

Facebook use: *Facebook celebrities*, *Conscious self-presenters* and *Information seekers*, and the general intensity of Facebook use. The results are presented in Table 2.

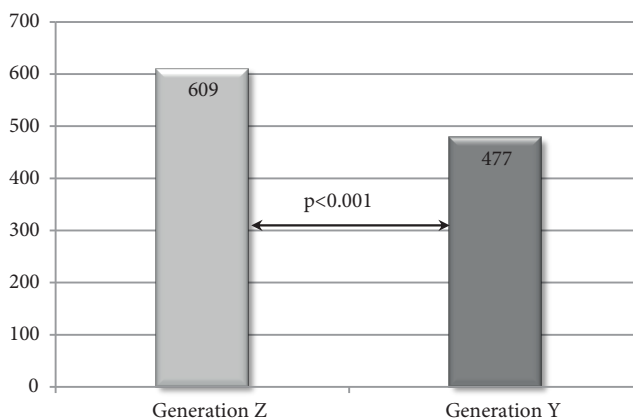


Figure 1. Generational membership and the size of friend networks in Facebook. The results of the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test for two independent samples

Table 2. The intensity of Facebook use and the size of friend networks on Facebook. The results of the analysis of Spearman's rank correlation.

| | Number of friends on Facebook | |
|---|-------------------------------|--------------|
| | Generation Y | Generation Z |
| Facebook as an inherent element of life | 0.50 ** | 0.00 |
| Facebook celebrities | 0.35* | 0.13 |
| Players | 0.20 | 0.13 |
| Conscious self-presenters | 0.32* | -0.10 |
| Fanpage members | 0.26 | -0.07 |
| Information seekers | 0.31* | 0.19 |

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Discussion

The results of the research showed that representatives of Generations Y and Z differ with respect to two factors in Facebook use: *Facebook as an inherent element of life* and *Fanpage members*.

Representatives of Generation Z more frequently treated *Facebook as an inherent element of life* than Generation Y. This means that Generation Z combines their everyday routine with Facebook use, and that they use Facebook intensively. Devoting a lot of time to Facebook use has negative impact on academic achievements and preparation for classes (Junco, 2011). Besides, students that intensively use Facebook may neglect their assignments (Ryan et al., 2016), which can negatively influence their grade point average (Kirschner, & Karpinski, 2010).

Persons belonging to Generation Z more frequently used Facebook to create virtual communities than representatives of Generation Y. It is important for Generation Z to actively participate in groups, e.g. to comment on other people's posts or take part in discussions. These results correspond with the fact that members of Generation Z use Facebook mainly to create groups which they identify with (Williams, & Page, 2011). The use of social media may not only support the process of socialization but also provide a sense of belonging (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006), however the use of Facebook in this way may negatively affect academic achievements (Junco, 2011).

In addition, representatives of Generation Z have more friends than persons belonging to Generation Y. This may result from the fact that representatives of Generation Z more frequently use computer- or telephone-mediated communication (Töröcsik, Szűcs, & Kehl, 2014). A preference for contacts through the Internet may be related to a sense of control in the relation, because each person may terminate the contact whenever the relation does not meet their expectations (Ryan et al., 2016).

The size of social network correlated positively with the intensity of Facebook use and the following styles: *Facebook celebrities*, *Conscious self-presenters* and *Information seekers*; these correlations were observed only in Generation Y. The use of Facebook in order to report on one's life, conscious creating of one's self-image and a drive for popularity on Facebook may be related to narcissism (Twenge, & Foster, 2010), or may be an attempt to build one's self-esteem (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006).

The correlation between the number of Facebook friends and searching for information may be explained by the research results which indicate that persons belonging to Generation Y aim at getting information (Frاند, 2000). Indications

that they value the use of search engines more than library queries have also been found, which results from the fact that they are able to get the information quickly and in a full form (Lippincott, 2005).

Limitations

It should be taken into account that in the above analyses the sample used was not very numerous. In addition, future research should also include other variables, such as narcissism, procrastination and grade point average, which would make it possible to determine the relation between the intensity of Facebook use and educational achievement; it is probable that persons who postpone learning use social media more intensively, and that this has a negative impact on their commitment and results in education.

Conclusions

Students often outdo their teachers in the ability to use new technologies, and expect changes to be taken into account in the educational process (Oblinger, Oblinger, & Lippincott, 2005). The use of social media, on the one hand makes it possible to get quick feedback, which may positively influence progress in education (Hattie, & Timperley, 2007), and support the process of socialization (Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006), on the other hand, it may contribute to the deterioration of social relations in real life (Twenge, 2014).

It is recommended that the specific character of Generation Y be taken into account in the process of education. However, it is worth checking if the methods suggested would also be suitable for Generation Z. It should be stressed that the preference for the use of new technologies in teaching among Generation Y does not preclude the use of traditional forms of pedagogy (JISC, 2007).

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